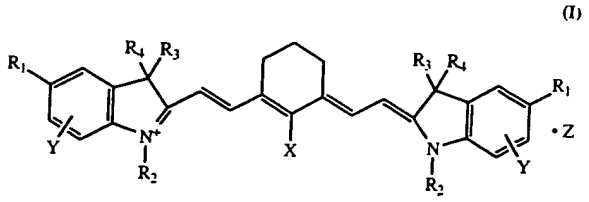
AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1. (Pending) A polymethine compound of the following general formula.



(I)

wherein R_1 represents an alkoxy group which may be substituted; R_2 represents an alkyl group which may be substituted; R_3 and R_4 each represents a lower alkyl group or R_3 and R_4 may combinedly form a cyclic structure; X represents a hydrogen atom, a halogen atom or a substituted amino group; Y represents an alkoxy group which may be substituted or an alkyl group which may be substituted; Z represents a charge neutralizing ion.

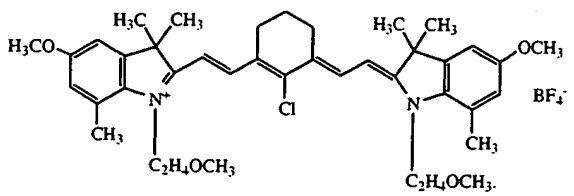
2. (Pending) A polymethine compound as claimed in claim 1 wherein R_1 is an alkoxy group containing 1~4 carbon atoms, R_2 is an alkyl group containing 1~8 carbon atoms, an alkoxyalkyl group containing a total of 1~8 carbon atoms, a sulfoalkyl group containing 1~8 carbon atoms or a carboxyalkyl group containing a total of 2~9 carbon atoms, and Y is an alkoxy group containing 1~4 carbon atoms or an alkyl group containing 1~4 carbon atoms.

3. (Pending) A polymethine compound as claimed in claim 1 wherein Z is Cl^-, Br^-, I^-, ClO_4^-, BF_4^-, $CF_3CO_2^-$, PF_6^-, SbF_6^-, $CH_3SO_3^-$, p-toluenesulfonate, Na^+, K^+ or triethylammonium ion.

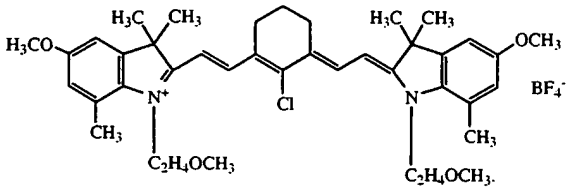
4. (Pending) A polymethine compound as claimed in claim 1 wherein R_3 and R_4 each is methyl or R_3 and R_4 taken together is a cyclopentane ring or a cyclohexane ring.

5. (Pending) A polymethine compound as claimed in claim 1 wherein X is H, Cl, Br or diphenylamino.

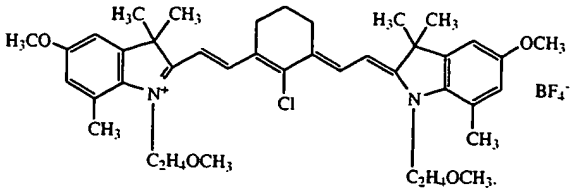
6. (Pending) A polymethine compound as claimed in claim 1 which is a low-melting crystal modification of 2-(2-{2-chloro-3-[(1,3-dihydro-3,3,7-trimethyl-5-methoxy-1-methoxyethyl-2H -indol-2-ylidene)ethylidene]-1-cyclohexen-1-yl}ethenyl)-3,3,7-trimethyl-5-methoxy-1-methoxyethyl-indolium=tetrafluoroborate having the following formula and showing a powder X-ray diffraction pattern with characteristic peaks at the diffraction angles ($2\theta \pm 0.2°$) of 11.6°, 14.6°, 15.6°, 19.6° and 22.9° in Cu-Kα powder X-ray diffractometry



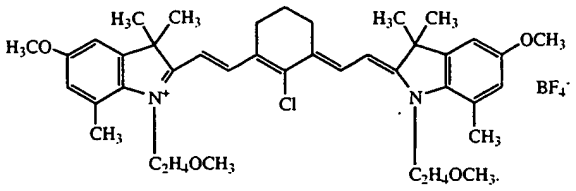
7. (Pending) A polymethine compound as claimed in claim 1 which is a high-melting crystal modification of 2-(2-{2-chloro-3-[(1,3-dihydro-3,3,7-trimethyl-5-methoxy-1-methoxyethyl-2H -indol-2-ylidene)ethylidene]-1-cyclohexen-1-yl}ethenyl)-3,3,7-trimethyl-5-methoxy-1-methoxyethyl-indolium=tetrafluoroborate having the following formula and showing a powder X-ray diffraction pattern with a characteristic high-intensity peak at the diffraction angle ($2\theta \pm 0.2°$) of 8.4° in Cu-Kα powder X-ray diffractometry



8. (Pending) A polymethine compound as claimed in claim 1 which is a crystalline methanol adduct of 2-(2-{2-chloro-3-[(1,3-dihydro-3,3,7-trimethyl-5-methoxy-1-methoxyethyl-2H -indol-2-ylidene)ethylidene]-1-cyclohexen-1-yl}ethenyl)-3,3,7-trimethyl-5-methoxy-1-methoxyethyl-indolium=tetrafluoroborate having the following formula and showing a powder X-ray diffraction pattern with characteristic peaks at the diffraction angles ($2\theta \pm 0.2°$) of 13.3°, 17.4°, 19.8°, 21.8° and 26.9° in Cu-Kα. powder X-ray diffractometry



9. (Pending) A polymethine compound as claimed in claim 1 which is an amorphous form of 2-(2-{2-chloro-3-[(1,3-dihydro-3,3,7-trimethyl-5-methoxy-1-methoxyethyl-2H -indol-2-ylidene)ethylidene]-1-cyclohexen-1-yl}ethenyl)-3,3,7-trimethyl-5-m ethoxy-1-methoxyethylindolium=tetrafluoroborate having the following formula and showing a powder X-ray diffraction pattern having no characteristic peak at the diffraction angle ($2\theta \pm 0.2°$) in Cu-Kα powder X-ray diffractometry



10. Cancelled.

11. (Pending) A process for producing low-melting crystals of the polymethine compound of claim 1 which comprises treating a crystalline solvent adduct or amorphous form of the polymethine compound of claim 1 with a solvent.

12. (Pending) A process for producing high-melting crystals of the polymethine compound of claim 1 which comprises recrystallizing the polymethine compound of claim 1 from a ketonic or alcoholic solvent.

13. (Pending) A near infrared absorbing material comprising the polymethine compound claimed in claim 1.

14. (Pending) An original plate for direct printing plate making which comprises the polymethine compound of claim 1 in a light-to-heat conversion layer constructed on a substrate.

15. (Pending) A method of manufacturing a printing plate which comprises irradiating the original plate for direct printing plate making claimed in claim 14 with light using a semiconductor laser having a light emission band of 750 nm~900 nm as a light source.

Status of Claims and Support for Claim Changes under 37 C.F.R. § 1.173(c)

Regarding the status of the claims, claims 1-9 and 11-15 of USP 6,342,335 remain pending. These constitute all claims of this patent.

Claim 10 has been canceled.